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What lies beneath? Some notes on ultra-realism, and the intellectual foundations of the ‘deviant leisure’ perspective

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In this brief paper, I explore the links between the developing deviant leisure perspective and ultra-realism, a theoretical paradigm developed over many years by Steve Hall and I (see, for example, Hall et al, 2008; Hall, 2012a, b; Hall and Winlow, 2015; Winlow, 2001, 2014; Winlow and Hall, 2009, 2012, 2013). I will describe in very simple terms ultra-realism’s intellectual framework before discussing how deviant leisure scholars might use these resources to solidify the intellectual foundations of their project.

What is ultra-realism?

At the core of ultra-realism lies an original account of contemporary subjectivity as it acts in its socioeconomic context (see Hall, 2012a, b; Hall and Winlow, 2015; Winlow and Hall, 2013. See also Ellis, 2016; Raymen, 2015; Smith and Raymen, 2016; Wakeman, 2017). For ultra-realists, many of the 20th century’s key theoretical paradigms are flawed not simply at the level of analysis; they are flawed at the foundational level. Authors working within these paradigms brush over, simplify and misconstrue the true complexity of human subjectivity, and, as a consequence, they are unable to identify the fundamental forces that drive individuals to act in ways that harm others and our shared environments. Many of these paradigms develop from an unacknowledged commitment to the old philosophical tropes of innate goodness and innate selfishness. For example, many of the theories that are gathered together under the umbrella of ‘left idealism’ (Young, 1975) assume that the subject is rational, essentially good and willing to struggle for freedom against the various repressive agencies of the state and the market. Left idealism’s traditional political and intellectual opponents tend to assume the opposite. Conservative criminologists (see, for example, Hirschi, 1969) develop their analyses from the basic assumption that the individual is dangerous and potentially evil and therefore must be controlled and civilised by modern social and governmental institutions. To complicate matters, right-wing liberals tend to disagree with right-wing conservatives, and often appear to endorse an interpretation of subjectivity that is more in keeping with their liberal cousins on

the political left. For them, the individual is essentially a rational and self-interested hedonist who can be encouraged to make the right choices by a functional social order and the core institutions of a minimal state. Others see the self simply as an object created and directed by the immediate social environment (for example, Shaw and McKay, 1972; Sutherland et al, 1995), and others still position the individual as a flexible agent periodically transformed, oppressed or liberated by ‘narratives’, ‘discourse’, and the vicissitudes of power and language (for example, Foucault, 2000; Milovanovic, 1997). Ultra-realists, then, begin by dismissing these paradigms as moribund and intellectually flawed. Ultra-realists hope to rid themselves of any vestigial attachment to our discipline’s dominant liberal and conservative intellectual traditions, in the hope that they might *rethink* subjectivity and the manifold problems that litter our shared environments.

Implicit in this drive to think and act anew is a desire to reinvigorate the discipline of criminology and set it to the task of explaining – rather than simply describing – new and long-standing social problems. Ultra-realists often claim that academic criminology has become intellectually barren. Descriptive, empirical accounts of policing and criminal justice practices, with little or no explanatory power, now occupy the centre of our discipline. Political and intellectual radicalism, such important features of our discipline’s past, are now desperately hard to sustain in the neoliberal university. Vapid careerism is endemic – an inevitable outcome, given the aggressive marketization of the university and the dumbing down of politics and culture – and contemporary academic careers are now forged in the white heat of competition. We must all be brilliant, productive, entertaining and inspiring all of the time. It is very difficult for genuine radicals to win research funding, and it can also be difficult for radicals to publish a new idea – one that does not utilise or rely upon canonical texts – in our major journals. Rather, grants tend to be given to criminologists who display resolute faith in parliamentary capitalism and the ability of the neoliberal state to solve social problems with carefully calibrated social policy interventions, and those who seek only to modify existing theoretical frameworks find it easier to publish their work than those who seek to reject existing theoretical frameworks in their entirety.

Critique aimed at the political right remains very common, and criminologists are often quick to chastise sitting governments for policy errors and their ongoing refusal to draw upon existing

social research when attempting to tackle social problems. However, if nothing changes as a result of this sustained critique, if the basic foundations of our economy remain in place and problems continue to arise, then we should perhaps begin to wrestle with the possibility that such critique is part of the system it appears to strenuously oppose. Perhaps such critique – which accepts the continuation of capitalism and the dominance of markets, and refuses to think through the problem of democracy – contributes to the continuation of a system that works against the basic precepts of a civilised and inclusive society? Does the reformist critic not play a role in maintaining the pretence of democratic accountability? Does the formulaic and stage-managed debate we see play out in newspapers and on news broadcasts not act to drive home the myth that politics remains alive and well and that power is constantly held to account? In his focus on small matters of policy, does the domesticated, reformist critic not ensure that the public is denied access to a critique that draws into question the very foundations of our present way of life? Criticism of the system is welcomed if that criticism remains generally reformist in nature. The population must be constantly reassured that the next general election offers the opportunity to change things. However, those forms of criticism that identify the continuation of the system itself as the principal issue at stake are usually side-lined, and rarely are genuine radicals given a major platform from which to speak. For ultra-realists, it is vital that we return to depth critique and reassert our right to construct new ways of interpreting the world. We must recognise that the imperative to be ‘policy relevant’ enforces firm limits on what can be thought and said. If we still hope to identify the fundamental causes of crime and harm, we must go deeper.

Ultra-realists refuse to engage in the standard practice of returning to established theories and core texts when a new social problem presents itself. The application of the mid-twentieth century criminological theory to twenty-first century social problems only rarely assists us in the task of constructing adequate explanations for and responses to the panoply of problems experienced by diverse populations in the real world. In the present conjuncture, critical social scientists often appear to be working in the dark with out-of-date tools. Many of the social science’s key themes and theories reference a world that no longer exists. While we must retain and work with concepts and ideas that can help us to understand the problems we face, regardless of their disciplinary origin, we must also be brave enough to discard out-of-date ideas that may provide a little comfort and familiarity but do not help us explain the gradual breaking apart of modernity’s partial achievements and the subsequent social problems that

appear to arise like the sun with each new day. Ultra-realists argue that we must recognise and acknowledge that many of the problems we face now are, in fact, genuinely new. We now occupy the Anthropocene era. Our social and political structures, our cultural life, the global economy and the natural environment have all changed enormously since criminology's early days. We cannot simply draw upon established intellectual frameworks and expect new truths to be revealed to us. We must scour the social sciences, the humanities and the natural sciences for research and ideas that have the power to illuminate the problems we face now. We must also have the courage to produce intellectual frameworks of our own. Criminology continues to think of itself as an importer discipline. But, now our infancy is well behind us and given the fact that we have grown enormously in recent years, shouldn't we attempt to produce and export a few ideas of our own? For years criminology has, for the most part, utilised the tools handed to us by 20th century liberal sociology, but these tools are no longer fit for purpose, and the intellectual frameworks currently in vogue in sociology fail to tell us anything of genuine importance about the decomposition of civil society. Nor do they help us to think through what might become of our collective life in the years ahead. Criminologists should now display the confidence needed to step out of sociology's shadow and take the lead in explaining the problems of our time. Criminology cannot be allowed to be turned into yet another sterile and factionalised social science, dismissive of new and challenging viewpoints, dedicated only to identifying populations who deserve sympathy, governmental assistance and the opportunity to improve their position within the system as it stands. It should go without saying that our job as social scientists is not simply to promote a liberal world-view. Our job as criminologists is to investigate the real world and construct honest and objective accounts of it before committing to the demanding task of explaining the problems we find there with as much creativity, imagination and rigorous and informed scholarly insight as we can muster.

Background

Ultra-realism has a range of diverse influences. From within the broad field of criminology, the subfields of victimology, feminism and left realism are notable. Key authors and researchers working in these areas attempted, at various points in our discipline's history, to break away from criminology's dominant explanatory frameworks. They also hoped to jolt the discipline out of its intellectual myopia and self-satisfied inertia and force it to look again at reality. Ultra-realism retains the drive to return to reality and to represent it truthfully, but, in

the standard dialectical manner, it hopes to advance upon the intellectual gains made by these authors and researchers, and, where necessary, reject entirely aspects of their work. For example, modern victimology challenged social constructionist accounts of the crime problem and drew attention to the genuine harms experienced by victims. The radical liberal criminologists of the sixties and seventies argued that crime is simply a social construct moulded by those who possess social power. The basic goal of these powerful actors, the radical liberals argued, is to criminalise deviants, reassert conventionality and in so doing maintain existing hierarchies and the conservative social order upon which they depend. However, for inhabitants of crime-ridden locales – or those victimised in a more direct manner by unjustly labelled ‘deviants’ – crime often corrodes, damages and wounds. The social, cultural, economic and psychological effects of crime upon victims are very often significant and left-liberal academics who blithely brush away these effects to promulgate their tired anti-authoritarian message teach us nothing about the reality of crime and contribute little of genuine value to our discipline’s well-being.

Victimology’s drive to investigate the effects of crime upon victims and its willingness to engage in speculative accounts of offender motivation have influenced ultra-realism, but ultra-realists are keen to utilise more rigorous models of subjectivity and construct better accounts of motivation and the internal life of the criminal actor (see for example Hall et al, 2008). In a similar way, feminist accounts of male violence revealed the intellectual errors of left idealist accounts of the crime and criminalisation. Early feminists unearthed a troubling reality in which female victims suffered greatly, and the police and the criminal justice system – rather than unfairly labelling and punishing offenders – ignored, failed to protect and stigmatised female victims of male violence. Ultra-realists acknowledge the huge contribution made by feminist scholars to the advancement of criminology. However, ultra-realists also claim that, as feminist accounts of female crime and victimhood were integrated in the discipline’s mainstream, the field of feminist criminology became rather doctrinaire and theoretically one-dimensional. Much feminist criminology continues to focus on violence against women, especially in the domestic sphere, and – generally speaking – the complex causes of male violence are reduced and simplified as mere context specific expressions of global patriarchy. This explanation for male violence is endlessly reproduced, and few scholars working in this tradition appear willing to deviate from it. Ultra-realists (for example Hall, 2012; Winlow and Hall, 2009; Winlow, 2012, 2014; Ellis, 2017; Ellis et al, 2017) have drawn on history, neuro-

science, philosophy and psychoanalysis, as well as sociology, cultural studies and socio-economics, in their attempt to build new accounts of male violence that are more accurate and free from the kinds of sub-disciplinary protocols that have prevented feminist criminology moving forward.

Left realists, too, advocated a return to reality. They hoped to dig underneath discourse and language to produce theories that could capture and explain the significant crime problems that arose as Keynesian social democracy drifted off into history to be replaced by an anti-social neoliberal order that remains with us still. Left realists began their project by simply acknowledging that criminals often inflict real harm on individuals and our shared environments. While left liberal radicals might have liked to find an element of class antagonism in the behaviours and choices of lower class criminals, the reality was – and is – very different. Working-class criminals for the most part victimise members of their own communities. Criminal entrepreneurs are not latter-day Robin Hoods fighting the good fight against an authoritarian social order. As both ultra-realists and deviant leisure scholars acknowledge, rather than kicking against an oppressive system, working-class criminals of both genders appear to be conforming to the competitive self-interest that lies at the system's core (see Smith and Raymen, 2016a, b).

Left realist scholars were willing to look again at capitalism, and, for ultra-realists, this is the most appealing aspect of their project. Left realists acknowledged that much of our cultural life is tied in a complex way to the core imperatives of the market. Capitalism itself – and the behaviours, attitudes and desires it cultivates in the social body – lies at the root of many of today's most pressing social problems. Left realism's intellectual intervention shed some light on the reality of crime and improved our discipline significantly. However, as time passed, it became clear that left realists were unwilling to abandon idealism entirely. 'Moral panics', a concept clearly rooted in idealism and the denial of reality (see Horsley, 2017), lingered on (see, for example, Young, 2009). Contemporary left realist accounts of riots and forms of political protest also remained unswervingly idealist. Corrosive self-interest and predatory violence, they acknowledge, are often an everyday feature of low-income neighbourhoods. However, they also claim that progressive politics exists in marginalised communities as a timeless fact of life, erupting into carnivalesque violence if the state allows the profit motive

to disturb the raw but functional cultural life of the people (see Lea, 2013; Fitzgibbon, 2017). Lea (ibid) even goes as far as to suggest that contemporary rioters see and understand the totality of global capitalism and that their actions should be understood as a direct attempt to topple capital from its lofty perch. More importantly, despite the apparent radicalism of the left realist approach, key authors fell victim to an aspect of market ideology that, since the end of the Second World War, has sort to encourage us all to believe that capitalism is the best of all available economic systems, and that any conceivable alternative to it will lead inevitably to widespread destitution and, in all probability, industrial-scale slaughter (see Lea and Young, 1993; see also Matthews, 2014). Once this basic feature of post-war capitalism's ideological project was accepted, left realism inevitably became yet another reformist movement that sort only to petition government to ameliorate social problems by redistributing capital and providing adequate job opportunities and welfare systems.

Elements of radical thought were certainly present in the left realist project, but when it came to the crunch most left realists were social democrats on economic issues and liberals on cultural issues. Rather than proposing forms of depth intervention that had the potential to cut problems off at the source, left realists hoped only to identify progressive and incremental social policies that seemed to possess the potential to reduce the suffering of marginalised populations. Ultimately, left realism failed to evolve and fell out of favour with younger criminologists keen to get to grips with an increasingly unjust and harmful twenty-first century capitalist system. Left realism also ignored subjectivity, fudged around root causes, and failed to develop a critical account of criminogenic post-68 consumer culture. While ultra-realists owe much to left realism's drive to take crime seriously, the differences between the two approaches are too great for ultra-realists to identify their project as a direct descendant of left realism. Twentieth century critical realism has had a much greater impact upon the development of ultra-realism.

Critical realism

For ultra-realists, critical realism, and especially the work of Roy Bhaskar (1997), offers a much more stable intellectual platform upon which to build. However, ultra-realists disagree with the transcendental aspect of Bhaskar's work that came increasingly to the fore towards the end of his life. Other critical realists, too, seem unable to truly dispense with the general

idealist faith that we all possess the capacity to transcend structures, environments and our own biographies and sail off towards the heavens to live a moral life unimpeded by the horrors of the real world (see, for example, Archer, 2008).

Critical realists begin by claiming that meaning and action are not genuinely autonomous. The meanings we ascribe to processes, events and our own biographies are inevitably influenced by the world around us and our experience of it, and our actions are, often unbeknownst to us, shaped by social relations, interdependencies, imperatives, events and experiences. These things form a totalising system, and they cannot be easily disaggregated. They inform one another at a fundamental level. Our experiences, our sense of self, our faith in our own agency, and so on, are tied up with and overlap other aspects of this totalising system. Bhaskar pushes past liberal sociology's obsession with free-willed identity construction by identifying the 'non-identity' that shapes our social experience. While liberals sing the lullaby of the self-created moral agent capable of changing its life at a whim, Bhaskar's point is to highlight the stark negativity and genuine contradictions that underpin the social world. Only knowledge of the structures and generative processes that shape our lives offers us the opportunity to improve things, and only by orientating activities towards this totality can our actions be considered properly political (see Hall and Winlow, 2015; Winlow et al, 2015).

So, critical realists believe that we possess the 'freedom' to think and act, but they claim that this freedom occurs within a very limited sphere. Our choices are always tied to the options presented to us, and to the various meanings ascribed to those options. We retain a degree of agency with regard to an array of everyday choices, but, crucially, we simply do not have the capacity to enact our 'freedom' at a deeper level, at a level that shapes our experience of everyday reality. For example, we do not have the capacity to act at the level where deep-state politics and the intricacies of the global banking system are reproduced. Despite the supposed liberties of parliamentary democracy, we are not invited to offer a view on a whole range of issues that affect our everyday lives. Nor are we able to make decisions that affect whole communities, whole societies, our economic system or the natural environment. We have no access to these realms of concentrated power, and they remain, for the most part, beyond our immediate comprehension. From this basic ontological model, critical realists develop an

epistemological model that enables us to grasp, in a very straightforward manner, the processes and forces that shape our experience of reality:

1. Empirical level – the predominant space of social experience. Subjects interpret events using common forms of representative knowledge
2. Actual level – the space of deep lying social processes that shape experience at the empirical level
3. Real level – the space of fundamental forces and generative mechanisms. The processes of the actual and the experiences of the empirical all have their roots in the real

Placed within this context, and put very simply, ultra-realists believe that criminologists must attempt to create causal chains that connect the negativistic experiences of the empirical realm to their fundamental causes that emanate from the real. Rather than simply describe harms, these harms must be identified as the outcomes of actual social processes, which in turn must be attached to the generative mechanisms that, ultimately, produce the various harms experienced by ordinary people. It is at this point that ultra-realism's theoretical project develops an empirical project to sit alongside it. Quantitative methodologies can occasionally reveal patterns and social trends at the empirical level, but if we are to take the next step of connecting empirically identifiable phenomena to complex social processes and root causes, we need qualitative methods capable of getting underneath basic patterns of social behaviour to the motivations and justifications of criminal and non-criminal actors. Ultra-realists claim that establishing networks of ethnographic researchers can provide us with the data and analysis we need to push past mid-level theory and begin to get to grips with the forces that occupy the real. The first step is to identify what Hegel called the concrete universal – put simply, the small components of the totality that can be taken to be representative of the totality itself. Networks of ethnographers, working, for example, in high crime areas across the west, should be able to identify a concrete universal, present in each location, that represents the totality of the liberal capitalist system. The structures and dynamic processes of neoliberalism, for which market logic is the dominant organizing principle, have already hollowed out deindustrialised zones throughout Britain. It is now perfectly clear that this process has reshaped rates of crime, forms of crime and spurred the development of new criminal markets. It is not simply presence

and action that are causative. Absence and inaction are also causative. The absence of solidarity, hope, real politics and stable and reasonably remunerative employment clearly inform social experience, and the absence of these things are connected to the onward march of neoliberal capitalism and its central principal of unequal exchange. Many individuals who live in marginalised social spaces have seen stable work and community life disappear and criminality and low-level disorder advance. Their experiences of decline and loss are examples of the historical concrete universals ultra-realists seek to investigate (see Winlow 2001; Winlow et al, 2017).

While critical realism's epistemological model is useful in encouraging critical thinking about the forces that shape the subject and its experience, there's something important missing. Ultra-realists generally argue that Lacan's conception of the Real has greater utility for scholars interested in capturing the forces that shape human action and inaction and the conscious and unconscious life of the subject. For Lacan, the Real is occupied by forces and processes that cannot be symbolised. The Real retains an elemental attachment for the human subject, and it possesses the raw power to transform our world in unpredictable ways. The Real escapes our comprehension. We are simply agog in the face of it, literally without the words to make sense of it (see Winlow and Hall, 2013, for a more detailed ultra-realist exploration of the Lacanian Real). Ultra-realists have also argued that critical realists have failed to construct a thoroughgoing account of ideology. Crucially, critical realists do not acknowledge the post-68 reversal of ideology, and the role the transformed structure of the dominant ideology has played in reproducing the conformity that lies underneath the surface diversity of the present epoch. During the modern era, the ruling ideology secured its dominance by ensuring that every individual worked to further the interests of capitalism while never becoming cognisant of the system's reality or their role in its continuation. As Marx claimed, ideology was a matter of *doing it without knowing it*. However, postmodern capitalism secures its interest by doing exactly the opposite. Knowledge of capitalism's dark side is now widely dispersed throughout the population. A good proportion of us can now at least begin to conceptualise the system, but our knowledge of its processes and effects does not prevent us for acting in accordance with the system's interests. We know of the hollowness of our politics, of the increasingly bland and commercialised nature of popular culture, of the ecological effects of our consumption and travel. We know that the system as it currently stands concentrates wealth in the hands of a tiny portion of the overall population. However, this knowledge doesn't act to inspire change.

Rather it acts to prevent the supposedly ethical individual from seeking change. It immobilises the subject and encourages it to delegate its dissatisfaction and discomfort to an agency willing to act on its behalf. We are invited, indeed encouraged, to decry the vulgarity of our political elites, as long as we continue to vote. We are invited to complain about consumerism, as long as we continue to shop. We are invited to worry about ecological catastrophe, as long as we do not begin to demand significant structural intervention. The potentially emancipatory moment of revelation has passed, and nothing has changed. The subject is encouraged to imagine itself as ethical and knowledgeable, and not complicit in the continuation of the system as it stands. The archetypal capitalist subject these days articulates anti-capitalist rhetoric while lost in the pursuit of transcendental purity and awareness. The material world remains off limits.

The reversal of ideology inspires what Žižek (2009b, *passim*) calls interpassivity (see Pfaller, 2017, for an excellent account of the role of interpassivity in contemporary culture). We do not feel any great responsibility to engage in progressive politics, because we are told the system itself is already subject to sustained critique. Multinational corporations, for example, tend to do a lot of high-profile charitable giving, and those corporations that pollute our planet most also tend to be engaged in activities to limit climate change and reduce environmental degradation. Films produced by large multinational corporations often present large multinational corporations as the ultimate bad guy whose pursuit of profit negatively affects human societies. Our politicians are usually the first to decry corruption and the long-running failure of our elites to tackle the problems we face. Prime ministers utterly dedicated to breaking apart the welfare state tell us with a straight face that they are committed to ensuring the poor are reintegrated into our society and given the help they need to improve their lives. The system effectively stages its own critique in order to encourage all to conclude that what exists is contested, the will of the majority and subject to progressive and incremental change. The staging of critique acts to reassure increasingly cynical and depoliticised populations that nothing too strenuous is required of them, beyond marking a ballot paper every five years. We withdraw, but we are encouraged to retain the conceit that we see the system for what it is, and that we play no role in its continuation. We see cynicism and lethargy in those around us and wonder why it should be us that applies the effort and makes the sacrifices to drive forward developing political causes (see Winlow and Hall, 2013). The decrepit state of working-class political institutions and communities has hamstrung the left, but the reversal of ideology I have described very briefly above has worked in tandem with this process to enforce what

Fisher (2009) calls *capitalist realism* – the general sense that capitalism can be neither overcome nor improved upon, and that any attempt to change things for the better will inevitably make things worse.

One key part of Žižek's critique of ideology, a part that has been used and extended by ultra-realists, is his concept of fetishistic disavowal. Fetishistic disavowal plays a crucial ideological role in shaping our everyday experience of reality, and ultra-realists place great emphasis upon it in within their overall epistemological framework (see Winlow and Hall, 2009, 2012; Hall and Winlow, 2015). Fetishistic disavowal refers to the process of choosing to repress troubling forms of knowledge. Some forms of knowledge appear to us too difficult to be faced head on, and so we *choose to forget* these pieces of information and cast them out of consciousness so that the everyday rhythm of our lives can continue unimpeded. For example, we may repress, disregard or explain away information that appears to suggest our partner is having an affair. After the reality of the affair can no longer be denied, disavowed information about the affair may return to consciousness, and we may be forced to ask ourselves why we ignored clear signs that an affair was taking place for so long. The answer is straightforward: it is often easier for us not to know about things that threaten to destabilise our routines, identities and commitments. Such forms of disavowal have, since that collapse of the modern symbolic order (see Winlow and Hall, 2012, 2013), become a crucial ideological mechanism that prevents us from acting now to address the staggering range of titanic problems that lie before us.

For ultra-realists, the fundamental problem with critical realism is the failure of its key proponents to fully dispense with the basic idealist faith in the existence of an eternal moral agent. Transcendental materialism, the intellectual framework developed by Žižek (passim) and extended by Johnston (2008), refuses to simply assume that there exists at the core of subjectivity an eternal moral presence that remains untouched by the prevailing totality. Instead, transcendental materialists construct a new and instructive account of the formative emergence of the subject through unconscious drives, desires, experiences and the hunger for coherent symbolism. Ultra-realists generally utilise the transcendental materialist model of subjectivity in their accounts of motivation, cause and harm.

Lacan argued that lack exists at the core of subjectivity. Rather than a fundamental force residing at the core of our being, there simply exists a void, or the absence of a thing. This constitutive absence drives the subject to construct a coherent symbolic order to assuage the perennial explosions of internal and external stimuli for which, in the absence of coherent symbolism, it has no frame of reference. The subject solicits a symbolic order to escape the terror of the Real (see Hall, 2012,a, b). Once the symbolic order is in place, meaning can be ascribed to phenomena. The subject, keen to keep the terrors of the unsymbolisable Real at bay, enters the symbolic order and submits to its meanings, customs and rules. When the subject has faith in its symbolic order, the constitutive lack at the core of its being is effectively 'filled up' with a symbolic substance that shapes desire.

Transcendental materialism owes a great debt to Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan claimed that symbolic orders are held together by the Big Other. The Big Other, of course, does not really exist. Rather it is faith in the existence of the Big Other that sustains symbolic orders. We perform for the Big Other. We seek to live by his rules. Žižek advances Lacanian theory here by developing an account of the decline of symbolic efficiency and the death of the Big Other. One of the many appealing aspects of transcendental materialism is its relevance to the world we live in, a world in which many of the basic precepts of western modernity are breaking apart. Žižek's account of symbolic efficiency rests upon faith. We believe that some aspect of our experience is rule governed, and proceed on that basis. For Žižek, the postmodern subject is denied access to the comfort of faith. We are forced to construct a cynical distance between ourselves and those things we are invited to believe in.

I do not have the space to discuss in any depth transcendental materialism's theory of the subject. Instead I urge you to track down key texts that offer a digest of this crucial area of study (see instead Johnston, 2008; Winlow and Hall, 2012, 2013; Hall and Winlow, 2015; Smith, 2014). All I will say at this stage is that we are not 'hard wired' for good or evil. Nor are we virtual automatons wound up and set in motion by our immediate social environment, and nor are we simply subjects forged by language and power. If we are 'hard wired' for anything, we are hard wired for plasticity. We can change, and when subjectivity changes, it changes in line with the real world and the forms of ideology that seek to represent it. The dominant accounts of subjectivity in the field of criminology are simply not up to the task of

illuminating the interaction of the subject, the ideological field and the transformed environments in which we live.

Conclusion

Ultra-realists are dedicated to the task of confronting the staggering range of harms that are the inevitable product of neoliberal capitalism. Now is the time to discard out of date frameworks and step boldly into the twenty-first century to face climate change, mass migration, social disintegration, growing inequality and the plethora of new antagonisms opening up on the cultural field with the honesty and integrity such colossal problems demand. The cultural turn has taken us further and further away from reality and the material world upon which we depend. We need to get off this track and return to analyses of the real world. There is so much to do here. Once we accept that twentieth century sociological and criminological theory has little to teach us about the broad range of new harms we see before us, and that it is our job to construct new accounts of the zemiological field, we are free to utilise a much broader range of intellectual resources. Deviant leisure scholars have done precisely that, and published work in this area already displays a willingness to dispense with trite accounts of consumer choice and the rebelliousness of youth culture in order to get to grips with the problems and paradoxes of leisure in the dead space of contemporary popular culture. Deviant leisure scholars consistently seek to connect everyday social phenomena to their root causes, and they have already drawn upon cutting-edge social, cultural and psychoanalytic theory to explore the ways that market ideology shapes the drives, desires and gnawing anxieties of the postmodern subject. They remain dedicated to the task of disabusing liberal sociologists of their antiquated belief in the supposedly oppositional politics of leisure and consumption, and steadfast in their drive to reveal the harms associated with everyday consumer practice. In contemporary consumer economies and cultures, the traditional work/leisure binary appears no longer to be applicable. Our leisure practices are increasingly tied to the generation of surplus value, and corporations often utilise the tropes of leisure and freedom to advance their control of occupational cultures and work practices. Work increasingly bleeds into leisure and leisure into work. It is vital that we reconsider the entire field of leisure studies, and deviant leisure scholars are at the very forefront of this endeavour.

My hope is that those involved in the developing field of deviant leisure can utilise ultra-realism's epistemological system to situate leisure and consumer phenomena in an appropriate analytical context. Furthermore, I believe key ultra-realist concepts – special liberty (see Hall, 2012a), pseudo-pacification (ibid), the criminal undertaker (ibid), post-sociality (Winlow and Hall, 2013), the traumatised subject (Winlow, 2012, 2014, Ellis et al, 2017), and so on – can assist deviant leisure scholars in getting to grips with the transformed world in which we live.

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